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ABSTRACT

Counselors must take a more active role in helping young people make the transition from school to work. If counselors are to become a part of the linkage system between school and work, they will have to change their posture from "neutral" sources of occupational and job information to active developers of information and to participants in the job seeking process. Presently, many of the hiring requirements based on education, aptitude testing, age, and appearance are questionable and unrealistic and contribute to the unemployment of young men and women. The only true measure of the effectiveness of a worker is his performance on the job. Yet hiring standards are rarely validated in relation to job performance. In order to bring about fairer hiring practices, counselors must act as "Change agents" and recommend to employers whose hiring standards are not valid that they should be modified. This proposition calls for a socially responsible activist role for counselors. (RSM)

What Counselors Should Know (and Do) About Employers' Hiring Requirements*

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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Every year about 400,000 school dropouts and 900,000 non-college bound high school graduates (male and female) enter the labor force for the first time. No one seems to have the responsibility for helping these youngsters make the transition from school to work. Most of the schools and counselors seem to think that once the youngster leaves the school system he is no longer their responsibility. The public Employment Service, because it has too many responsibilities, cannot provide the kind of service needed by many of the new labor force entrants. Parents often do not have the information and background that would help the youngster.

We know that the transition from school to work is not smooth because more than 200,000 of these young men and women cannot find jobs. Our industrial society does not offer the security of apprenticeship programs to very many of our young men. If we compare what happens to new entrants in Great Britain with our experience this difference becomes dramatic. Of the 256,000 boys who entered employment in Great Britain in 1968, 110,000 obtained apprenticeship positions. 1/ This country had about 111,000 new registration and reinstatement apprentice actions in that same year. Although we do not know how many of our 633,000 male dropouts and non-college bound high school graduates entered the career route to journeyman status via

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1/ Employment and Productivity Gazette, May 1969, Vol. LXXVII, No.5 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office).

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apprenticeship programs in 1968, we are probably quite safe in surmising that far fewer of our young labor entrants went this route as compared with the more than 40 percent in Great Britain.

I suggest that since we offer so little security and help to our young people in moving from school to work, counselors might think about taking a far more active part in this process. I offer for your consideration a possible new re-direction for the counseling profession as an inherent part of the linkage system between school and work.

Let's step back a moment and put ourselves in the shoes of many young workers who are about to seek their first job. In addition to their youth, these youngsters are handicapped by inadequate work experience, poor education and training, discrimination because of color and lack of information about employer hiring requirements. Moving from the relative security of the school situation to the world of work must be a fairly overwhelming experience for many youngsters with no previous work exposure.

Not only do the youngsters move from school to work but many of them actually make a geographic move at this crucial period in their lives. We know that in primarily agricultural areas, youth constitute over 60 percent of all migrants. Some school officials estimate that up to 90 percent of their recent high school graduates leave the rural communities. 2/

Even the youngster who looks for a job in his own community needs help. He often does not know to which employer he should apply for a job. He

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2/ Guy H. Miles, William F. Henry, and Ronald N. Taylor, Summary of Research Report, Optimizing the Benefits of Neighborhood Youth Corps Projects for Rural Youth (Minneapolis: North Star Research and Development Institute, for the U.S. Department of Labor, Manpower Administration, 1969), p. 2.

does not know whether an employer is interested in new labor force entrants. He knows little about working conditions, wages, application forms, interviews, references and employer hiring requirements. In many cases he does not know about private employment agencies or the free services of the public Employment Service and he may not be aware of training opportunities offered by the Federal Government.

If counselors are to become a part of the linkage system, they will have to change their posture from "neutral," or "passive," sources of occupational and job information to active developers of information and participants in the job-seeking process. Most of the guidance information produced in this country is so general and oriented to broad national situations that it is of limited value to the counselor or the young labor force entrant. Counselors can and should help these youngsters by providing specific local and regional information of practical use to these young men and women.

Let me use the issue of local employer hiring requirements as the vehicle to demonstrate the need for the new role of the counselor.

How can counselors provide some realistic assistance to these young men and women? They can do this by telling them about employer hiring requirements. These requirements can be developed by counselors from local sources and conveyed to prospective workers in such a way that many hours or weeks of time can be saved in the job hunt.

What are employer hiring requirements? These are a set of requirements such as, educational achievement, ability to pass tests, sex, appearance, age and experience. As one of our researchers described

them, "Most hiring standards are not really hiring standards at all, but screening procedures. They are designed to select from the applicants a group of people with a high probability of successful performance on the job." 3/

In addition to the hiring requirements just mentioned, another barrier to employment is that of occupational licensing. In 1960 -- the year for which the most recent data are available--there were more than 7 million people working in occupations that are licensed in one or another jurisdiction. A 1968 study of New York City licensing indicated that about 500,000 workers in that city alone were affected by licensing laws. 4/

Let us now look at a few of employers' hiring requirements:

Education

In a recent study of employer hiring policies in the San Francisco Bay area conducted for the Department of Labor, we were advised that most of the larger companies hiring clerical workers required at least a high school diploma. About 3 out of 5 firms specified that a high school

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3/ Work Force Adjustments in Private Industry: Their Implications for Manpower Policy (Washington: U.S. Department of Labor, Manpower Administration, 1968), Manpower/Automation Research Monograph No. 7, p. 14.

4/ Occupational Licensing and the Supply of Professional Manpower (Washington: U.S. Department of Labor, Manpower Administration, 1969), Manpower Research Monograph No. 11, p. 1.

diploma was a minimum requirement for a clerical job. 5/ The most frequent reason employers gave for requiring a high school diploma for unskilled or service workers was that high school graduation tended to provide evidence of promotional potential. Some of the other reasons given were that the high school diploma indicated that the person had the ability to complete assignments, could read and understand orders and procedures, was motivated, adaptable to training and had character.

In another study of hiring requirements, recently completed for the Department of Labor there were interesting variations in educational requirements for the same job in the same city as well as between different cities. In this study of 10 major entry and near-entry level occupations in the New York and St. Louis Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas (SMSA) the industry segments which insisted on higher educational levels stressed the link between education and the ability to communicate, comprehend

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5/ Margaret S. Gordon and Margaret Thal-Larsen, Employer Policies in a Changing Labor Market: Report of the San Francisco Bay Area Employer Policy Survey (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California, Institute of Industrial Relations, for the U.S. Department of Labor, Manpower Administration, 1969), p. 272.

Some 309 establishments with 100 or more employees representing all major industry groups were surveyed in the San Francisco-Oakland and San Jose areas in 1967.

instructions and promotion potential. 6/

At this point we should note that except for one or two jobs, an analysis of education in relation to measures of job performance, such as total income and supervisory ratings both at the establishment and industry levels, yielded no significant relationship. In 17 out of 20 occupation-industry groups, the employees' years of schooling were unrelated to measures of job performance.

Aptitude or Other Selection Tests

Almost 60 percent of the establishments in the California study used aptitude or other tests in the selection of clerical workers. But only about a third of the establishments used these tests for the selection of sales workers. Again, the larger firms which are likely to have personnel departments are more likely to use tests. Finance, insurance and real estate companies which tend to be large and employ large numbers of clerical workers use selection tests. Government agencies are also more likely to use tests.

Businesses which were single unit establishments were considerably less likely to use selection tests than branches or headquarter units of multi-unit or larger firms.

6/ Daniel E. Diamond and Hrach Bedrosian, Industry Hiring Requirements and the Employment of Disadvantaged Groups (New York: New York University School of Commerce, for the U.S. Department of Labor, Manpower Administration, 1970), p. 9.

The 10 occupations studied were: Bank Teller, Cashier (checker), Hotel Clerk, Salesperson (parts), Shipping and Receiving Clerk, Arc Welder, Press Feeder, Production Machine Operator, Wireworker, and Orderly. The numbers of establishments which contributed data were: 286 in New York and 275 in St. Louis.

The use of aptitude or other written tests tends to work to the disadvantage of many potentially qualified black applicants. Scores on intelligence and aptitude tests have generally been standardized on the white middle-class, thus biasing interpretations of the scores of lower-class Negroes. 7/ In this study supported by the Department of Labor the researchers' review of the literature revealed that, generally speaking, minority applicants face several types of problems in the taking of job tests. Differential background experiences are one factor. Family socio-economic status and rural-urban residence have been found to be correlated with test performance. Racial discrimination often interacts with family background to produce certain personality traits which affect the scores of Negroes: loss of self-esteem, lowering of aspirations, hostile reactions, and rejection of the dominant white culture affect the ability to take and pass tests.

Age

Although the great majority of companies in the New York-St. Louis study refused to consider applicants under 21 years of age, citing their alleged immaturity and instability, sizeable industry minorities saw no differences in age groups. The majority of employers surveyed in California indicated that the minimum age was 18 with the reason given as "legal minimum." Many comments made to the interviewers in the California study

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7/ Jeffry Piker, Entry Into the Labor Force: A Survey of Literature on the Experiences of Negro and White Youths (Ann Arbor, Mich.: The University of Michigan, Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations, for the U.S. Department of Labor, Manpower Administration, 1968), p. 247.

tended to substantiate the widespread impression that there is a scarcity of career job opportunities for youths under 21.

Appearance

Except for some of the factory production jobs, the New York-St. Louis study indicated that appearance was almost universally regarded as an important factor in the hiring decision. Although many employers believed that appearance was an important determinant of a workers' effectiveness on the job, they had no objective guide to appearances. The lack of a guide raises an interesting question particularly at a time when hair styles and clothing preferences are in a great state of change. There is probably a considerable gap between organizational norms and the fast-moving experimentation of society at large.

The New York University researchers concluded that many employers have "appearance tests" which may be more damaging to the employment opportunities of disadvantaged black applicants than paper and pencil tests. If the applicant fails the appearance test, he has little or no opportunity to indicate his credentials or ability to perform the job.

We could continue to review many of the requirements of employers in addition to education, aptitude testing, age and appearance and the conclusions would all be quite similar. Many of the hiring requirements are questionable and unrealistic. Despite what we have learned long ago and many times about overstated hiring requirements and preferences, employers with unrealistic standards often suffer from costly turnover problems. For example, in 8 of the 10 occupations studied in the New York-

St. Louis survey, a majority or close to a majority of the companies studied regarded workers in the entry or near-entry occupations as key source employees for promotion. Yet, in reality, in most of these occupations, promotion possibilities were rather slim. Workers had less than one chance in ten of being promoted in a two-year period.

Although there is obviously no one single cause for the high unemployment rates for young workers, there is little question that hiring requirements, preferences and procedures play a significant role in contributing to the unemployment of young men and women. Little seems to be known about how these hiring requirements evolved. We believe that, in many cases, the process is a subjective one--usually involving personal judgments of personnel people, supervisors or foremen. We do have evidence that many employers fail to test whether a requirement or particular set of requirements are justified.

The only true measure of the effectiveness of a worker is his performance on the job. Yet in many cases management does not know if the hiring standards used really select the best applicant because the standards are rarely validated in relation to job performance.

Up until now personnel directors have been rewarded for screening out low productivity workers or those who may not fit the real or imaginary hiring standards of a company. Now the Federal Government is asking private industry to screen in people who have been, heretofore, screened out. This new situation may well be a traumatic experience for management and personnel directors. We may well have to think about or

develop a new reward system for those personnel people who bring in to the system the very people they were being paid to exclude in the past.

Before turning to what counselors can do about employers' hiring requirements I commend to your attention, and possible duplication, a very sensible and practical exercise which, in my opinion, produced a valuable and useful source of information which can help both counselors and youngsters. A group of counselors recently participating in a career development and occupational information institute at Arizona State University produced a report which supplies specific information about types of industry in Phoenix, number of people employed by firm, occupational skills used by the company, hiring requirements such as age, sex, physical condition, education and tests offered.8/ The counselors who visited 107 businesses and industries, 20 referral services and 20 technical trade and business schools in the Phoenix area supplied in their report other information needed by youngsters such as the availability of entry jobs, training opportunities within the company, the location of the hiring office, working conditions, summer work opportunities, unionization, wages and fringe benefits.

8/ Working Together: Reports of Counselor Visitations, Institute on Career Development and Occupational Information (Tempe, Ariz.: The Institute, for Arizona State University and Arizona State Department of Vocational Education, 1969).

The counselors collected information from referral agencies as to the kinds of services offered, kinds of clients served by the agencies, and kinds of assistance to individuals such as training allowances. Included among the referral agencies were an economic opportunity center, the Neighborhood Youth Corps and Family Service Centers.

The counselors also supplied information about technical, trade and business schools which indicated the type of training offered, admission requirements, tuition costs, size of school, placement assistance offered, the demand for graduates, salary possibilities, length of training, living facilities and possibilities of financial assistance.

This type of exercise provides a practical learning situation about occupations and careers and develops better communications between people employed in government, education, business and industry. This can lead to a necessary linkage between school counselors, employers, the public employment service and private educators. A linkage of this type can fill the vacuum which now appears to exist in the transition between school and work.

What Can Counselors Do About Employers' Hiring Requirements?

I should like to offer three propositions for your thinking in response to this question.

The propositions I will lay before you cannot be undertaken by counselors without significant assistance and support by school administrators, the Employment Service and others concerned with the

transition from school to work. If these propositions are accepted we will need a total commitment and team effort by many people. We will also need a new interpretation of the function of the counselor in our society.

The first proposition calls for the counselor to take a more active part in providing the linkage between school and work for the students he counsels. This calls for a slightly different role from the one we now see. The counselor who provides linkage must become familiar with the industrial composition of the area he serves and the job opportunities available to his students. This linkage effort will require him to know and be known to the Employment Service personnel, employers, trade union leaders, private school educators, referral organizations and administrators of publicly supported training programs.

By becoming the link between school and work the counselor will, by his actions, demonstrate to the youngsters whom he counsels that he has a personal commitment to help him make the transition to work. When that youngster sits across the desk from a personnel director or supervisor he will know that the preliminary spade work of his counselor who cooperated with the Employment Service counselor made this interview possible. The information supplied by the counselor before the employment interview will have been practical and helpful.

My second proposition relates to the first and third propositions. I refer to the Arizona exercise and should like to suggest that counselors take upon themselves the assignment of information developers. A run-down of local employer hiring requirements alone may make a major contribution

to improving a labor market which does not always function at top efficiency. Again, I am suggesting a far more active role for counselors than we have seen heretofore. In many cases the Employment Service and vocational educators will have already made a start in setting up the system in getting some of this information.

After information on local employer hiring requirements is developed, a counselor can offer a more realistic job-hunt strategy for the young men and women he serves. For example, he can alert those who do not do well in written tests that some of the larger companies will require applicants to pass tests. He can advise applicants that some companies do not offer employment opportunities for new labor force entrants. He can alert dropouts that certain companies require that all or most new employees be high school graduates. The counselor can suggest to some job applicants that certain companies have appearance requirements which may rule them out.

The third proposition would also bring many counselors into quite a different role. This proposition suggests that if counselors accept the commitment to provide every possible assistance to the people they serve, then it is incumbent for them to act as "change agents" in recommending to employers that if their hiring standards are not valid they should be changed. This proposition calls for a socially responsible activist role for counselors.

I am suggesting that if a counselor knows that some local personnel people are prejudiced against minority groups it is incumbent upon him as a professional person, with a social commitment, to persuade the "gate-keepers" of our society to open wide the gates of employment opportunity.

I am suggesting that counselors must persuade employers that rational business practice requires examination of the job as well as the applicant. As one of our researchers who has completed a study of minority workers in the banking industry has pointed out, "In many cases, the inability of the applicant to produce a coherent work history, produce formal educational credentials, and pass a hiring test is irrelevant to job performance."9/

Counselors can recommend that objective and written criteria may help employers make more intelligent selections in the choice of workers. Subjective factors such as appearance, speech or manners are pretty thin threads upon which to base hiring requirements. Counselors can act as friends in court for youngsters by asking employers to understand differences in appearance.

Above all, counselors might suggest that employers should establish simple validation procedures so that hiring practices can be periodically validated in terms of job performance.

9/ R. David Corwin, Minority Workers in the Banking Industry: The White-Collar Factory (New York: New York University, Department of Sociology, for the U.S. Department of Labor, Manpower Administration, in process).

The issue of hiring practices desires a thorough review. The Department of Labor through the JOBS (Job Opportunities in the Business Sector) program is now making a frontal attack on hiring practices that are artificial barriers to employment of the disadvantaged. The National Alliance of Businessmen (NAB), which consists of leading business executives, is supporting the JOBS program by persuading private employers to experiment with reduced and different hiring requirements. Each participating employer agrees to waive his usual hiring procedures and requirements such as pre-employment tests, education, references, and bonding. Counselors who join in this review of the hiring requirements of employers will be making a positive contribution to this complex problem.

Essentially, I have raised a series of questions which I believe deserve serious attention by counselors as well as by the makers of manpower policy. There are those who may question the practicality of a suggestion which calls for busy and over-extended counselors to act as linkage agents between school and work. This suggestion of a new role for counselors carries with it the implication that if new and more extensive duties are imposed on counselors we may need far more and different counselors from those we now have.

I recognize that counselors alone cannot bring changes in selection standards. This will require a program of public education and persuasion leading to continuous evaluation and validation of selection tests. The philosophical issue here is whether private or public employers can use standards which deny equal and fair opportunity to all citizens.

The question of counselors as positive participants in social change in our society raises issues which can only be answered by the profession as a group and individuals within the profession. Not all professional people are persuaded that they have a function as change agents.

I offer this statement for your review and reaction.